those who run with the wolves

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those who run with the wolves

by multifandom_fanfic_writer

Summary

When Will gets released from the Baltimore State Hospital for the Criminally insane, he doesn't return to work with the FBI. He goes home, to his pack.

A month later, the world ends.

Notes

Non-linear story telling because fuck timelines am I right

This story is loosely inspired by the Fallout-verse, this other Hannigram post-apocalypse fic, and how much I love the idea of Will with wolves.
And I also love this poem, so I included it!

See the end of the work for more notes

girls who run with the wolves
aren't there for boys to love
and you can run all you want-
but in the light of the moon

the wolves will always call you back

(there are wolves, they would say. and there are stories about wolves and girls.
girls in red. all alone in the woods, about to get eaten up.)

wolves and girls.
both have sharp teeth.

When Will gets released from the Baltimore State Hospital for the Criminally insane, he doesn't return to work with the FBI. Instead, he goes home. To his pack. To hunt.

A month later, the world ends.

When Will first moves to Wolf Trap, he feels like an intruder.

He can't quite place the feeling. Will ignores it, as is his default coping mechanism, and settles in the old house with ease. By the time he's finished painting the whole thing three months have passed. He fixes at least three holes in the walls, discovers then cleans the boarded-up basement, and explores the surrounding forest. During the day, that is. Something keeps him from wandering out at night, an insistent feeling in his gut. Will is not in the habit of ignoring his instincts.

One early morning, Will sips his lukewarm coffee, looks around, and decides to call this place *home* for real.

No matter how much he still feels like an intruder.

Will has never been normal in any sense of the word. His empathy, his autism, his hobbies all set him apart from others – but nothing does this more than his interest in killers.

In the darkest nights, Will sometimes wonders why exactly he hunts them. Why he immerses himself in their thoughts and minds and lives. Is it to save their victims? To do something meaningful with his life? To make Jack proud?

Sometimes, when Will leaves a crime scene his hands twitch towards his gun. Are his thoughts his own, or that of the killer he's hunting? It must be an impulse to defend. Or that's what he tries to believe. Will is a good liar – especially to himself.

Hannibal's office feels like another world. The walls are dark and cool, a sea of nothingness to drown into, only interrupted by the occasional animal skull. Death is many a man's greatest fear. For Hannibal, it is decoration. Maybe this is why when Hannibal asks him about his day, Will tells him.

(What will he do when the thoughts eventually turn into his own?)

Hannibal does that thing where he smiles predatorily with his eyes but not with his mouth. Will pulls at his sleeve and looks at the doctor's shoulder.

"It is natural to feel the impulse to kill, Will. Are you troubled by that feeling?"

Will bites his lip. "Yes."

"Are you? Is that really what troubles you? The impulse, or your lack of guilt?"

Will swallows. "I don't know if my feelings are my own or not."

"Don't you?" Hannibal asks, and leans closer. "Others place expectations on you. You see them, their wants and needs and thoughts, and copy their expectations on yourself. You chain yourself down with them and tell yourself this is how it is supposed to be. But you are supposed to be free."

Will stares.

Hannibal cocks his head and his eyes glitter. "Why do you work for Jack, Will? Do you want to save the victims? Avenge them? Or," and Will does not react, does not move a single muscle as Hannibal speaks, "is it something more complicated than that?"

Will fidgets with his glasses, gaze on Hannibal's chin. *No,* he thinks, *it is not. On the contrary – it's simple.*

I'm lonely, and I'm looking for someone like me.

Thinking back on that day, staring at the grey walls of his cell, Will wonders which perception of him is closer to his true self – his own, or Hannibal's.

It's not quite clear how the virus is born. Usually, there would be a scramble of conspiracy theories and government-mandated research teams and rich businessman eager to answer the big question: whose fault is this? Who is to blame?

Yet there is none of that. The reason is as simple: the virus spreads too damn *fast*.

They know some things. Someone, somewhere, is tallying numbers, maybe in Russia where the thing first hit, so that the rest of the world could be prepared.

(They are not. Nothing could have prepared them for this.)

When you catch the virus, there is a fifty percent chance you die within three days. If you survive, there is another thirty-three percent chance your brain does not.

Not entirely.

The little media that remains is calling them *zombies*. Sensationalism until the end. It doesn't quite fit, but it gets the idea across.

Will prefers to call them Feral.

That's what they are, after all. Feral beings, not an ounce of the person they used to be left with their meat shells. They lash out and consume whatever living thing comes near them; be it animal or human. There is not much else known about the virus, other than that it must be airborne. By the time such research would have started, the world has already descended into chaos.

Soon, one third of the world's population is all that's left.

At least they've solved the problem of overpopulation. Climate change too, probably. The thought lies wryly in Will's mind.

Alone in his bed, Will closes his eyes and thinks of Hannibal.

Adjusting to life in Wolf Trap is easier than Will thought. He takes up teaching at the FBI Academy, with feels more bitter than sweet, but at least he's making ends meet.

His life is solitary, but satisfactory. It gets better when he finds a stray dog on his way from work one day – and drives by the local animal shelter to get her a companion immediately. Harley and Ellie brighten up his day, even if it takes them a little while to warm up to him. There is life around him now, movement, colour. Will still doesn't feel free, but his dogs do, and maybe that's enough. He lets them run as free as they'd like.

He refuses to buy a leash.

Three weeks after he's adopted Harley and Ellie, he comes home to an empty house. This doesn't worry him, not at first, but when night starts to fall the unease that has been creeping its way into his bones finally reaches his heart.

Will takes his shotgun and his warmest boots and ventures out into the forest.

It is not his territory.

But he can't lose the first two living beings that have made him feel loved.

When Will is imprisoned in the Baltimore State Hospital he realizes two things.

The first is that Hannibal Lecter is not just the Copycat, but the Chesapeake Ripper, too. Jack's arch-enemy.

The second is that no one will believe him.

(The third is that this makes him feel relieved).

When he finds Harley and Ellie, they are not alone. Will finally realizes whose territory he is infringing on and freezes.

The wolf is tall and imposing. Its muscles are visible through the brown-red fur, almost crimson under the moonlight. The beast seems *more*, somehow, not quite monstrous but not entirely mortal either.

It is looking at him. Sniffing the air almost inquisitively.

There are patches of pale fur along its flank, an old scar dissecting its nose. Its gaze is piercing, cutting through Will's mental barriers with more skill than many a psychiatrist he's been forced to.

Harley and Ellie are nestled between its paws. They happily trot over to Will when he enters the clearing and stills. The wolf lets them go, eyes never leaving Will.

Will makes a decision. He lets go of the gun. He averts his eyes, bares his neck, and waits.

When he dares to move again, the wolf is gone.

(Wolves hunt in packs.)

The walls of his prison seem impenetrable until they're not.

Will squints his eyes against the bright sun as he makes his way out of the back entrance of the Baltimore State Hospital for the Criminally Insane. Dr. Chilton had seemed surprised by his request, told him Jack was more willing to give him a ride, but Will knew better. He can do nothing for Jack. Not anymore.

Alana is more than happy to pick him up instead, driving him to Wolf Trap with a mix of concern and pity in her eyes. Will is surprised by how little it affects him.

Still, he plays his role. He asks her about the others; about Jack, about Beverly. About Hannibal. The look in Alana's eyes when she talks about Hannibal is enough.

Will doesn't know if the feeling in his chest is betrayal or jealousy.

She drops him off at Wolf Trap and tells him his car will be brought by tomorrow.

"What about your dogs, Will?" she asks with a note of sympathy in her voice.

Will wants to laugh but suppress the urge. If he starts, he won't be able to stop. Vaguely, he wonders if anyone had cared to check for his dogs at all. Had Hannibal stood here, months ago, tilting his head curiously as he surveyed the dog-free area?

His pack is well-trained. They wouldn't have come out, not even for Hannibal.

"Don't worry about them," he says with a forced smile. It feels more natural than it used to.

"Okay," Alana responds, though she sounds unconvinced. "I'll see you later, then?"

Once upon a time Will might have invited her in. "See you," he lies and watches her drive away.

Even now, a part of him wishes he'd called Hannibal instead.

A curled-up ball of fur lies next to the entrance of the local grocery store. Grey tufts of fur peek out underneath the dirt when Will washes him with lukewarm water and gentle hands. The dog bares his teeth at Will until Ellie comes closer and snuffles at him. The half-washed dog settles down after that.

A colleague complains about his dog, a casual offer to take her off his hands, biting back the feeling of anger. The little runt is the smallest dog he's picked up yet and stays very, very still, unaccustomed to receiving this much affection, yet starving for it. Will can sympathise.

Buster and Zoe are wonderful additions to his pack.

Will feels a pair of watchful eyes circle his cabin more often than not. The dogs run around freely, sometimes disappearing into the woods for hours. Will's nights are troubled by monsters that were once human. When Will wakes up with a shiver down his spine, he knows the wolf is near. He does not feel threatened.

Wolves are pack animals.

Slowly but surely, the woods begin to feel like his territory as well.

Now that he knows the wolf, Will sees it often. His pack roams the whole stretch of his lands; from the river west to the sandbanks up north. Sometimes with him, sometimes without.

The wolf is never far. A flicker of crimson between the brown of the trees; the softest of footsteps following him on his walk. The dogs seem more energetic when it is near.

It must like them.

His dogs are well-behaved, always coming when he calls. He hasn't trained them so much as reached an understanding with them. They're far easier to communicate with than people.

One morning, eyes trailing a flash of fur in the corner of his eye, Will thinks about taking it further.

Jump. Fetch. Bite.

He doesn't think the wolf will like it, so he refrains. He doesn't know if he likes it, either. It would make him feel safer. It would make him feel tempted.

Later that week, Will returns from the river, fishing knives strapped to his boots. Buster is nosing around his bucket, smelling the fish; Zoe had stayed home, lazing around the porch. As Will takes another step, Harley and Ellie freeze simultaneously. Will turns to look at them, eyebrow raised.

When they sprint into the woods with purpose, Will does not hesitate to draw the knife from his boot and follow them.

He is too late.

Will hears the barks of his dogs and the much deeper growl of the wolf before he sees the man. Clad in simple hunting gear, the man has trained his shotgun on the wolf, who is already bleeding from its neck.

Enemy is the first thing that flashes through his mind.

Harley and Ellie insert themselves between the wolf and his attacker. Their fur is wind-swept and their eyes are afraid, but their teeth are bared. Will's lips twitch upwards for a fraction of a second.

The man turns his head to look at Will, eyes searching, and Will makes sure to angle his body to hide the knife.

"Nice catch," Will says with a smile that could have been friendly. The man huffs and turns his attention back to his prey.

His finger twitches against the trigger, still pointed at the wolf. At his dogs.

My territory, Will thinks, and sinks his knife into the man's neck with ease.

The man gurgles and spasms with shock, letting the shotgun fall out of his hands to grasp uselessly at the steel protruding from his neck. Will watches him bleed out impassively and a little curious. He wonders if he should mention at his next lecture how easy it is to become a killer. All it takes is the right moment, the right threat, the right potential.

Stare into the abyss and all that.

He is pulled from his contemplation by the growl of the wolf. Will does not hesitate to rush to the wolf's side, taking in the blood surrounding the beast, crouching down as his dogs nervously flutter around him.

Something is wrong. He looks into the wolf's eyes, thinks *why the hell not,* and opens his mind.

Oh, he thinks an eternity later.

Oh.

The wolf gives a last push and closes her eyes for good.

Will is left with two newly-born wolf cubs and a new weight on his shoulders.

When the virus reaches America, Will gathers his pack close.

He's lucky to live the way he does. There is enough game around him to keep him and his pack fed; enough rivers to quench his thirst. Little chance of stray Feral, too, this far out. But he knows only the basics of survival. It won't be enough.

Will is proud. He will go out to meet his fate on his own terms.

The first thing Will does when the panic hits is to get into his car and drive to the local library.

It's abandoned, much to Will's surprise; unlike the looted and Feral-infected grocery stores he's passed on the way. He meets one other human there, a young woman with the both the complete Harry Potter and Lord of the Rings collections in her hands. Their eyes meet. Both of them are startled. They let each other be.

Will loads his car full with books on anything that might be useful. How-tos on hunting, cooking, braiding, first aid. Gardening; farming; infrastructure.

A selection of fiction books, to pass the time. (Including Lord of the Rings.) Advanced medical texts – insofar they exist in this local library – even though he doesn't understand most of them.

Hannibal would.

When he arrives home, he stores the books in his basement and locks his pack outside. He's been close enough to other human beings to catch the virus for sure. Now the only thing he can do is wait.

There is an itch at the back of his throat. It passes within the hour. Will eats his last piece of fruit.

Three days later, he still feels fine.

Figures.

It's remarkable how much red wolves can look like normal dogs, especially when they are still cubs. Will researches like a man possessed: he wants to give Max and Jack the best home he can.

Will doesn't tell anyone. He's not sure there is much to tell, really. His pack, his business. And he doesn't want to end up in jail. The patch of dirt that hides the man who tried to kill his dogs in the woods agrees.

His job as a teacher at the FBI academy gets boring, but when he sees a man that he thinks is the Head of the Behavioural Science Unit pass him in the corridors, he still averts his eyes. He's failed his psychological tests thrice, already. Will has no desire to run through that circus again. Instead, he forces himself to socialize with a few fellow professors.

Dr. Araya tolerates him, at most, but Will gets what he needs. Get a professor talking about her subject and they will not be able to stop.

Dr. Araya knows a *lot* about police dogs. His packs learn a couple of new commands. Bite. Track. Guard.

Kill.

Max and Jack take to it exceptionally well.

"Thank you for the ride, Dr. Lecter."

"Really, it was no trouble at all. After what you had to confront today, Will, I would not stand for letting you get a cab."

Will ducks his head, cheeks colouring at the honesty in Hannibal's voice. "You, uh, want something to drink?" He probably has some coffee, somewhere, that would completely fail to meet Hannibal's standards.

"How kind of you, Will," the man answers and turns off the car. Will steps out of the Bentley, giving Hannibal's chin a grateful smile. Hannibal follows behind him, though slowly.

The sounds of paws against the leaves grows louder. Will is so busy worrying about his lack of culinary standards that he hears himself give his customary whistle. *It's safe. Come.*

Will freezes mid-step. When had his subconscious decided Hannibal was safe?

But it's too late to warn his pack away. They are already there, tongues lolling out of their mouths and Winston barking excitedly. They are the picture of doggy playfulness. Max and Jack do not stand out at all.

Out of the corner of his eye, Will registers the miniscule shift in Hannibal's shoulders. If he hadn't spend so much time observing the man he would not have noticed it at all.

Right. The man probably would prefer to keep his suits clean.

"Sit," Will calls out sharply and all seven members of his pack skid to a halt and obey. Even Winston. Will clicks his tongue in approval, to which several tongues make a reappearance in happy doggy smiles.

"Seems there are seven after all," Hannibal remarks. The slope of his mouth speaks of amusement and approval.

Will smiles, a warm feeling in his chest, and says nothing.

The last of his pack, Winston, joins him just before his life changes.

The night after he comes home from the Minnesota Shrike, Will calls his pack inside and lets himself feel the numb until the warmth of their fur heats him back up. In his mind, he can still hear the gunshot, see the blood pouring out of Abigail's throat. Hannibal's hands, steady and confident, stepping in where Will faltered.

Will blinks, arms full of Winston and Ellie and Harley and Zoe and Buster. Max is circling the edges of the living room with intent, eyes reflecting the moonlight. Jack is hidden in the corner, eyes sharp and dangerous.

Will falls asleep feeling safe.

Jack – Crawford, that is – is interesting, though not very kind. Alana, sweet Alana, is kind, but not interesting.

Hannibal is *very* interesting, no matter how much Will pretends otherwise. He is not kind. Polite, yes, always. Not kind.

It's close enough.

There's something about the doctor that makes Will want to meet his eyes. From the look on the older man's face the fascination is mutual. When Hannibal's car pulls up to his house for the first time, Will is home. His pack is outside somewhere. Will does not call them, only comes out to greet Hannibal with a bland smile.

Winston darts from the woods anyway, unable to help himself sniffing the newcomer. The rest of the pack stays hidden. They're good dogs.

Will snaps his fingers, and Winston comes to heel.

Hannibal smiles at him. This time, it even feels mostly real. "He is very well trained," the doctor remarks. The bland politeness of his tone cannot disguise his interest.

"Yes, he is."

"Is this your only companion? You mentioned having seven dogs, once."

"I did," Will agrees, and does not elaborate.

Alana thinks it's cute Will's dogs get so much time to play outside. Jack never seems interested. Hannibal regards his pack with fascination when he meets them, those rare occasions he lays eyes on them. He does not seem to know a lot about dogs – or wolves for that matter – and Will is not sure if he's relieved or not.

A six month's stay in the BHCI later he still does not have an answer to that question.

Whenever someone asks, Will reassures them he has a local dog-sitter that's always ready to answer his call. He does not say anything about how well his pack can fend for itself.

After the debacle with Gideon, Will debates truly introducing Hannibal to his pack, maybe even teaching him some commands. Then the encephalitis kicks in and it doesn't seem relevant anymore.

Much later, Will considers it a blessing.

Two weeks pass after day zero. Will wonders if the virus has hit Jack. Alana. Hopes it turned Chilton Feral so that Will can shoot him himself without feeling too bad about it.

(He doesn't think he would feel bad about it either way.)

Will hunts a deer, walks to the river every day, and tries not to think too much about Hannibal.

The second week brings two visitors; both are Feral. Their skin is flaking and dark with infection, the rot and death polluting the air so heavily even Will can smell it. One he kills himself. The other gets torn apart by his pack.

It saves bullets, Will supposes.

After Will returns home from Baltimore he does not feel like a whole person. His skin is too lose. His mind is untethered, his anchor dissipated into smoke. His hands twitch, body uneasy after such a long period of confinement.

His pack greets him with profound happiness. Will lets them bury him and feels tears stream down his face.

Jack Crawford calls him seventeen times before noon. Will throws his phone in the river.

"Come on, guys," he says to his pack after the sun has gone down. "Let's go hunting."

He leaves his shoes at his home. The stones and leaves scratch his skin, bare soles rapidly cooling against the cold earth. As Will makes his way through the surrounding forest he lets the pain ground him.

Laying in wait as the boar shuffles closer, Will sees the shadowed stag on the opposite side of the clearing, antlers towering high and feathered fur rustling silently. He aches to touch it. Instead, he keeps his eyes on it even as he signals his pack to move in for the kill.

When he drags the boar home and skins it he feels the approving brush of a stone-cold nose on his neck. The antlers throw long shadows over the kitchen counter.

Will closes his eyes and breathes. The stag is gone when he opens them.

There is a brief surge of hope as the Tattler reports that the Ripper is finally caught, but when Chilton's name is plastered underneath the headline, his hope withers.

That's what you get with the culprit leading the case, Will thinks wryly. He wonders if he should feel guilty about letting this happen. He doesn't. Max noses his paw as he ponders this, so Will scratches him behind the ear.

The next weeks go much the same. Will hunts with his pack, breathes with his pack, feeds with his pack. He is not quite a person anymore, but he is something. A leader. The single strand of his identity that has made it through the whole crisis.

The stag is with him more often than not, now. Will goes from fearing it when it is there to missing it when it is gone.

His pack warns him whenever they hear a car coming closer. Jack, Alana, Beverly- Will swiftly retreats into the woods to hunt. Hannibal's Bentley never pulls up.

Will convinces himself this is a good thing.

He spends the weeks after the BHCI in deep reflection, stocking up on canned vegetables and beans, hunting for meat or going fishing every other day. The only people he speaks to are the clerks at the grocery store once a week. Will feels content. He has never been a social person.

Looking back, even considering the encephalitis, Hannibal had in some ways treated him better than Jack. Warned him away from the work, which had indeed harmed him. That Hannibal also harmed Will himself – well. Will has never been particularly concerned with his own well-being.

He'd been much more concerned with being understood. Being *seen*. Just like Hannibal had been, in his own way.

When it's late at night and Will can't sleep, he beckons the stag closer and buries his nose in its fur.

There is not much known about Will Graham's life outside of the FBI.

If you ask his students, the most commonly known titbit about Mr. Graham is that he is a dog person. It's true, too. Hannibal had mused upon the same thing, once upon a time, with something akin to approval. At that time, Will had wondered why. Now he knows.

Dogs are hunters, too. Predators that like to kill in the company of others.

He thinks he could have forgiven Hannibal if not for Abigail Hobbs.

Somehow, she had become his. *Theirs*, even, their not-quite daughter. Of course their whole thing wasn't even on the same planet as a healthy family dynamic – not that any of them cared.

But then Hannibal killed her. Threw her away; threw *them* away. This means Hannibal can't be trusted.

Will tries very hard to convince himself of that. His dreams are haunted by flashes of blonde-grey hair and maroon eyes; looming antlers and blood dripping down his face, down his throat. It tastes good.

He still doesn't know what to do.

Frederick Chilton still comes to Will, even now.

Will does not allow him inside the house. They stand outside and argue – or, rather, Chilton shouts at him in desperation while Will tries to resist temptation. It's never been his strongest suit. These weeks alone in the woods have turned him into something more… primal.

(Chilton really is being quite rude.)

Will is feeling far less kindness towards Chilton than he used to. Less human, too, his two wolves brushing against his legs. The man has always irritated him. Will had just been freed from the too-long months under Chilton's *care*, and now the imbecilic dares to infringe on *his* territory. Demanding *help*.

"No one believes me," Chilton says frantically. "You were the only one I could think of who would-"

"You must disappear," Will cuts through Chilton's panicked rambling. "He'll find you, otherwise."

Chilton nods, eyes frantic. "You're right. I must."

"You tell anyone you came here?"

Chilton shakes his head, eyes unfocused. "No one. You are quite the pariah, even now."

Will grits his teeth, already thinking which lake to drown the car in. "Good." His voice becomes harsh. Commanding. His fingers twitch with purpose. "Hunt." Will had wanted to test his commands on real prey for quite a while now. No time like the present.

Chilton frowns, eyes re-focusing on Will. "What do you--"

His pack feasts.

Will's dreams are as vivid as ever.

Once, he dreams about his home in Wolf Trap. Waking up to the smell of breakfast, a barely-cooled spot next to him. A love bite in his neck. Descending the stairs with a smile.

Hannibal is in the kitchen, fiddling with a coffee maker that Will does not own. He is wearing an apron over his pyjama's. Will presses a kiss to his neck and takes a seat at the table, closing his eyes to better breathe in the smell of omelette and meat. The lungs are freshly harvested. Cassie Boyle's corpse is displayed in his front garden, and Will admirers the view as he eats.

When he opens his eyes, he is alone is his bed. It is the middle of the night.

For a few fevered moments, caught between dreams and the waking world, Will wonders why Hannibal isn't next to him.

Three weeks after day zero, Will gets his first human visitors. A man and a woman, armed with guns, untrained and desperate.

Will snaps his fingers. His pack fans out.

He steps outside, hand on the knife on his belt, eyes the newcomers warily.

"How may I help you?"

The man barks a laugh. "Well, at least you're fuckin' sane."

Will gives him a wry smile. Buster slinks around his legs, teeth bared and eyes on the intruders. Around them, waving through the trees, his pack watches. Waits.

The woman shrugs with a smile. Neither of them lower their guns. "You on your own here, or affiliated?"

Will cocks his head. "Affiliated?"

The woman gestures to her shoulder, and it is only now Will sees some crude rendition of a snake has been sown into the fabric of her T-shirt.

"We're with the Vipers, from up by Reston," she says. Will raises an eyebrow.

"Who else is there?" he asks curiously. That was fast.

The woman relaxes her stance, though the man does not. "DC is still unclaimed, likely to stay that way for a bit. There's us, up in Reston, and I heard some kind of cult sprung up near Ellicott. Baltimore has been taken by the Ripper and his elk, and Rockville has fallen to ruins."

"Sash," the man hisses in reprimand. Sasha can't help herself. Will reminds her of her younger brother, dead in a car accident weeks before the virus hit. Sasha doesn't know if she's relieved about that or not.

Pulling himself out of the woman's mind, Will frowns. "The Chesapeake Ripper?" he asks.

“That’s what I heard,” the woman replies, shrugging. “I mean, makes sense, don’t it, in this new world. The weak are meat, the strong eat.”

Something in her tone tells Will she’s done being friendly. The man next to her, seems to agree. Around them, the forest has fallen silent.

“So what now?” Will asks.

The man smiles. It is not a nice smile.

Will looks into his eyes and knows that this man has welcomed the apocalypse. He’d felt so powerless in his old job, a wife he didn’t quite love and a boss he hated. Now he is powerful, as the corpse of his former boss can attest. Who is dead weight now, *bitch*.

“Now,” the man says, “you oughta give us all your stuff so we won’t kill you.”

“Or,” the woman cuts in, “you could join the Vipers. If our leader approves. She has standards, but I think you’ll make the cut.”

Will huffs and looks up to the sky for just a moment. He thinks back to the last moment he felt whole, staring at the back of Hannibal Lecter as he left him to his prison cell.

As if there is any other choice.

“I apologize,” he begins, and the woman grips her gun tightly. “But I’ve already been claimed by someone else.”

Will does not hesitate to meet the man’s gaze with a hard and cold one of his own. He bares his teeth, and he feels his pack start to react.

“*Kill*,” he commands and throws himself forward.

Two shots resonate through the air, both wide. Will’s ears are ringing. He doesn’t hear the footsteps as his pack advances. Neither do the pair of Vipers.

They do not stand a chance.

As Max jumps high and tears into the man’s throat, Buster jumps low and claws at the man’s hand. He drops the gun, and Will smiles. *Good boy*.

On the other side, the woman has turned to run, but the weight of an almost fully-grown wolf on her back stops her in her tracks. Her hands scramble for the gun, but Will is faster and wrenches it from her hand easily.

Zoe has her teeth deep into the woman’s leg. She’s the smallest and the single most vicious out of his entire pack. He pets Zoe’s head even as he reaches for his hunting knife, deciding to end Sasha’s suffering quickly.

The man, on the other hand, was quite rude. As he slowly suffocates on his own blood, Will does nothing but watch.

“I wonder what design Hannibal would have made out of you,” he wonders aloud, but the man has already lost consciousness.

After it’s done, all Will feels is a grim sort of satisfaction. “Good job,” he tells his pack. They accept his pats easily, even his wolves. The blood on their teeth suits them.

It’s kind of beautiful.

Will is left with two corpses and eight bellies to fill. *Waste not, want not*, he thinks, and hauls the bodies inside. It’s the goddamn apocalypse, and he’s apparently eaten it often enough. It can’t be that dangerous.

Sometimes, Will wonders how much Hannibal changed him, and how much darkness was in him from the start.

Just after Will discovers he is immune to the virus, a thought occurs to him.

What if Hannibal is not?

He must be. The Chesapeake Ripper, the Copycat, and who knows what other titles the killer has gathered – of all people, Hannibal surely must be safe.

If Hannibal was dead already, then why should Will keep living?

The self-proclaimed Vipers have a car. It’s still working. Even has a spare container filled with gas. He also has his own car.

The next day, Will gets Max and Jack and a small amount of rations, and does not drive to Baltimore. Instead, he drives to the local church, estimating it his best bet.

There are only six people inside. They greet him warily. They have no guns, only knives, and eye him and his wolves with fear. Will trades the few rations he’s brought with him for information and leaves feeling a little bit better.

The Rippers, huh, he thinks as he shakes his head. How gauche.

Hannibal must hate it.

The local priest had warned him far away from Baltimore. “The Devil reigns in that city, Mr. Graham,” the priest said him after Will had asked one question too many. “Save your soul and do not enter His domain.”

Will had smiled at him and didn’t have the heart to tell him he’d lost his soul thrice over already.

He drives back to Wolf Trap and settles in for the long haul.

Will is an excellent fisherman.

Four weeks after the end of the world – and one more dead Feral later – three cars pull up his driveway. Front and centre is a familiar Bentley.

Will does not let the satisfied grin show on his face. He may have won this battle, but the war is far from over.

Instead, Will whistles sharply, and his pack closes in around him as he stands in front of his house, bullet-proof vest looted from one of the Vipers tied snugly around him, gun held loosely in one hand.

His best weapons are circling around his feet, anyway.

From the two unremarkable cars exit only strangers, though their eyes are curious, not hostile. The door to the Bentley opens and Hannibal steps forward.

Will's breath catches in his throat.

Hannibal is somehow still in a fucking three-piece suit. At first sight, he does not look that different. But only at first sight. The posh grace and demure politeness Hannibal has always held himself with has vanished. It is replaced by something even more graceful, lithe, *lethal*. Hannibal's eyes are maroon in the afternoon sun and there is a scratch on his face, breaking the otherwise perfect facade.

Before, his strength was hidden. Now he wears it like a badge. *Predator*, Will's hindbrain screams at him, and he feels his pack tense up.

Will bares his teeth. His pack mimics him.

"Will," Hannibal breathes. It sends a pang of longing through his soul. Will does not let it show on his face.

"Dr. Lecter," he echoes blankly, doing his best to keep his face as blank as Hannibal's. He's reminded of the sea of Hannibal's office; the nothingness you could disappear into. "I expected you to hold out for longer."

Hannibal cocks his head. His eyes are piercing. "No longer on first-name basis, my dear Will?"

"It's difficult to maintain a friendship when both parties are not honest with each other," Will replies, eyes narrowing, "When one party holds all the cards."

"That is not the case, now."

Will releases a breath through his nose. "So you say."

"I have never lied to you, Will," Hannibal responds. Will barks out a laugh. "Not directly," the doctor amends, "and not without reason."

“Please,” Will spats, and he cannot help himself. He drops the gun and draws his fishing knife, metal glinting in the sunlight.

The four strangers around him tense. Two raise their guns. Hannibal gestures sharply, not even looking at them. They stand down without question. Will does not need to look at them to see the fear in their eyes.

He takes a step forward.

“It’s not just being the Chesapeake Ripper. Or the Copycat,” another step, “or whatever other alias you killed under, before. It’s not even the cannibalism,” Will admits out loud for the first time. Around him, his pack advances slowly, matching him step for step. Their teeth are hidden, their bellies pressed to the ground. Sheathed.

Hannibal does not bat an eye as Buster and Harley circle closer around him, Max and Jack two steps behind. His eyes are on Will and Will only. It would be flattering if Will wasn’t playing this game, too.

“Especially because now,” Will says bitterly, guesting broadly, “those things hardly matter anymore. Even the fact that you lied to me about my own mental health, *framed me* – In time, I could have dealt with even that.” From behind the Bentley, the stag watches him steadily.

“Oh Will,” Hannibal says lowly and his eyes do not leave Will’s face. There’s something heated in the fact that even now Hannibal is unable to give him anything but his full attention. “You value yourself so little. I should not have taken that risk with your beautiful mind – taking it so far is one of the few things I honestly regret--”

“I don’t *care*, Hannibal!” Will shouts in response, temper flaring, and snaps his fingers twice.

His pack reacts before anyone else can, even Hannibal himself. They literally jump into action – the two wolves wrestle the Chesapeake Ripper to the ground even as the rest of his pack spreads out threateningly to the other humans.

Will is not far behind Max and Jack. He’s not sure if Hannibal lets him or if the doctor is genuinely surprised – the end result is the same.

It’s almost to easy to push the knife to Hannibal’s neck.

“Hold,” he growls to the wolves and they freeze.

Hannibal’s mouth falls open. Something like admiration shines in his eyes. The usual dark waters of the doctor’s mind are rippling, changing. Will can feel the edges of *reliefarousalhappinesswariness* creep up on him.

He leans forward until his nose touches Hannibal’s.

“It was obvious what your plans were for me, in hindsight. Not just making me a killer – making me an *equal*. Someone who could see you.”

“You did see me, Will,” Hannibal says, and the way his mouth curls around Will’s name makes it feel strangely intimate. “You are the only one who ever could. And you turned out to be so much more than I dared to dream.” Even now, pushed to the ground and literally a hair’s breath away from the jaws of death, Hannibal sounds strangely breathless.

“In the end,” Will says, “it’s not about what you did to me, or to those strangers.” His eyes flash. The knife presses closer. “*You killed Abigail.* She was mine – she was ours. *Our* responsibility – and you threw it away.” Blood wells up underneath the steel.

“The ultimate declaration. A betrayal of your own pack,” Will snarls. “I could never trust a traitor.”

“Did I?”

Will presses the knife closer. His eyes darken. “What.”

Hannibal smiles. Raises his voice. “Abigail, dear, you can come out now.”

Will’s head shoots up, though his hands do not waver. The car door opens and a ghost steps out.

“Abigail,” Will breathes, breath visible in the cold air.

The girl standing in front of him is clad in warm furs. He counts at least three knives on her. Her face is pale, cheeks fallen in, and she does not look well-rested. She only has one ear. But above all, Abigail is very much *alive*, bright eyes and a tentative smile on her face.

“Is this real?” Will cannot help but whisper. The knife to Hannibal’s throat does not start shaking, but it is a near thing.

Abigail’s voice is soft, but confident. *Rehearsed,* something inside of Will whispers. “We faked my death. I was the bait.” She doesn’t need to say anything more.

Will barks out a harsh laugh, curls falling in front of his face. He bows his head as his body starts to tremble, and once more catches sight of the predator still caught under his knives and wolves.

Hannibal has been watching Will patiently, not making any move to escape or struggle. Maybe he could’ve gotten away. Maybe Max and Jack would have torn out his throat first.

“*Why*,” Will brings his face closer to Hannibal’s again, readjusts the knife. “You had no reason to.”

Something flashes in Hannibal’s eyes. “I did.”

Will’s pupils dilate. “Me. It was for me. Because I cared about her, because a part of me wanted to keep her close. And you, you wanted to keep *me* close.” Hannibal does not answer, watching the gears turn with fascination.

“Would you have killed her, in the end?” Will narrows his eyes. “Will you, now?”

“Will, I would–“

Will presses the knife closer and growls, a low sound in the back of his throat. His wolves respond to his visible aggression. Max echoes the growl, the sound far more intimidating, echoing around the clearing. Jack digs his teeth deeper, and Will watches with satisfaction as Hannibal cannot supress a flinch of pain.

“Do. Not. *Lie*. *To. Me*.” Will brings their faces closer with each sharply punctuated word until their noses are practically touching. Like this, the crimson flecks in Hannibal’s eyes are more evident than ever.

“Back then? Maybe,” Hannibal admits, pupils almost eclipsing his iris. “Depending on the circumstances. *Your* circumstances. Now? No, likely not. There is no purpose, and Abigail has proved herself twice over.”

The words are like hooks, sinking themselves into Will’s mind. The casual disregard regarding a life of their could-be daughter, the underlying possessiveness in Hannibal’s words. Will flinches back, taking the knife from Hannibal’s throat and scrambling backwards until he is standing on shaking legs.

His wolves do not move.

Will closes his eyes, running his hand through his hair. If he listens closely, he can hear the footsteps of his stag, coming closer.

When he opens them, his eyes fall on Hannibal’s minions. They are regarding him with fear now, instead of wariness. A hint of confusion. One weird hermit backwater nobody holding a knife to their leader’s throat – and letting go?

“This world is different now, Will. It requires different things. From all of us.”

Will turns his gaze back to the prone figure of the man who haunts his days and nights. The shadow of the stag falls on all of them. “Different masks?”

“Wouldn’t you say I have dropped mine, dear Will? Let the monster out?” Hannibal’s eyes burn into his soul.

Will shakes his head before Hannibal is even done talking. “No, no, that’s bullshit and you know it. First of all, you’re nothing quite as simple as a monster. You are…” A deep breath. “You have always been both the mask and the wearer.”

Will stops talking. He stares into Hannibal’s eyes and feels something stirring in his gut. Swallows. “The art critic and dinner party host are just as much a part of you as the Chesapeake Ripper. This is not the first time your more unsavoury hobbies have gained you a reputation,” Will suddenly realizes as Hannibal’s tongue flickers out to whet his lips.

“You are dangerous,” Will says, stepping closer until his feet touch Hannibal’s prone ones. He has to bow his head to look Hannibal in the eye. A hero, with the villain at his feet? Will snorts. A deity, passing judgement? Hannibal certainly looks at him with enough reverence.

A lover scorned, their other half begging for forgiveness?

“You have the ability to adapt to any situation. To improvise – to blend in. Adjust the setting of your person suit until, once again, you are at the top of the food chain, and no one even remembers a time when you weren’t.”

Hannibal breathes out slowly, eyes fluttering. Savouring. “Like this, Will,” he whispers, “you are breath taking. Unique. *Free*. The fisherman, luring me in. I had no chance but to bend to your will. The bait was too captivating to resist, even when the hook within it was clear. And so the trap was sprung,” inclining his head to the wolves still holding him down.

“You are the one who has let go of your masks,” Hannibal continues. “The expectations of society, the morality Jack forced upon your mind, it matters not in this new world. And so has it set you free, to be who you are meant to be.”

Will laughs. “What? Your pet?”

Hannibal bites his lip, shakes his head. “No. My equal.”

Will’s breath catches. His eyes bear into Hannibal’s. For a moment it feels like they are the only people in existence. The only two alive, that have ever lived, that will ever live.

It doesn’t feel as different from normal as it should.

Will closes his eyes. “Release. Heel,” he says in quick succession. Low growls and rumbles of dissatisfaction, followed by the sound of dozens of paws on leaves. Warmth at his legs and back.

Will breathes in. Breathes out. Opens his eyes.

Hannibal is in front of him, suit torn, shoulder bleeding, and a look of elation on his face. The stag is behind him, resting its head on Hannibal’s head then bending downwards, down, down, until it’s merged with Hannibal himself.

Hannibal’s skin turns black, horns protruding from his head. His eyes are still the same, maroon in the light of the sun. His mouth is smiling.

He has never looked more beautiful.

Will blinks, and the world returns to normal.

Hannibal takes another step closer, within reach of both Will and his pack. “You have always been a survivor, Will.” It sounds like a prayer. “Even now, in this new world, you thrive. I would not have expected anything less.”

Will barks out a laugh but it catches in his throat and comes out strangled. “You must be so very exited at all this,” gesturing at the world around them. “Now, you are not a monster, but a king. A god among men. Something you always knew, but now the world admit it too.” Will cocks his head. “What was that saying again? Kill one man, a hundred, thousands?”

“If I am to be a king,” Hannibal interrupts him, and his tone is intimate. He holds one hand out, long and slender, and Will surprises himself with the urge to take it. “I would ask you to be my queen.”

Will sputters.

“That is to say,” Hannibal corrects himself, a downwards twitch of his lips betraying his annoyance at his own lack of eloquence, “I would ask you to share my throne. Rule with me. As--“

“Equals.”

Hannibal inclines his head. “Equals.”

A moment of silence.

“I have a castle.”

Will sighs. “Of course you do.”

Hannibal’s lips twitch.

“Less than a month after day zero, and already lord and master of the land. Feared and respected above all, are you not? How could you not be. The Chesapeake Ripper, turned from a nightmare to a protector. If you had to shack up with on a monster, they must all think, why not choose the most dangerous one around?”

Now, Hannibal is the one that bares his teeth, something that could have been a smile. “I keep them safe. I protect what’s mine. I could keep you safe, as well.”

Will cocks his head. Considers. “You must be bored already.”

Hannibal’s Adams apple twitches. His next words are painfully honest. “With you at my side, Will? Never.”

Will cannot help but smile ever so slightly, turning his face up to the sky.

His wolves are soft and reassuring at his side.

A hand claps into his own. The warmth of a body comes closer, and closer, until they are almost be embracing.

The sun is warm upon his face.

“Come with me,” Hannibal whispers in his ear.

There is not a cloud in sight.

End Notes

Might write another chapter about their life at the castle if people would like that, might not because I have like 3 WIPs yknow oops?

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If you love Hannigram and especially sub!Hannibal, come join us at discord.gg/MGyUQvY

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